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GOSHEN — After waiting six months for the federal government to approve their plans, Orange County officials may soon begin spending \$3.5 million in stimulus funds they got to improve energy efficiency in their buildings.

The money was awarded almost a year ago as part of the \$787 billion stimulus package and will likely be used to replace drafty windows and aging boilers, install insulation and test innovations such as “green” rooftops in 10 facilities officials have targeted.

Determining which projects would save the most energy is the first task. The county will spend \$200,000 for Honeywell International to study the buildings and recommend improvements, a process that could take two to three months, according to county Planning Commissioner David Church.

The actual work could begin by summer, and must be done within two years, he said.

Rep. John Hall, D-Dover Plains, stood with Church and county legislators on Friday to celebrate the grant in one of the buildings likely to undergo energy improvements – the Valley View Center for Nursing Care and Rehabilitation.

County officials are considering replacing the windows and doing other upgrades in the oldest section of the complex, built in 1968. Replacing the heating and air conditioning system alone is expected to cost about \$3.4 million.

The county calculates its projects will create work for 38 people, cut at least \$530,000 a year from its energy bills and eliminate 1,300 tons a year in greenhouse gases.

The money was distributed through a program Congress created in 2007 but didn’t fund until the stimulus package provided a chance to do so. Lawmakers tucked \$3.2 billion in the bill for Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants.

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